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ABSTRACT

This paper examines information services and resource sharing within New Zealand with a view to future participation in a Pacific resource sharing network. Activities of the National Library, the New Zealand Library Resources Committee, and the Information Services Committee are reviewed over a 40-year period, illustrating library cooperative efforts that include information exchange, links to British and Australian libraries, a national network for scientific and technical services, national cooperative library services, and online network links to Australia and the United States. Future links with the Pacific area are considered in the light of current resource sharing experience with Southeast Asian nations and the NASA/PEACESAT Pacific-wide information sharing facility. (RAA)

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INFORMATION SERVICES IN NEW ZEALAND AND THE PACIFIC

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INFORMATION SERVICES IN NEW ZEALAND AND THE PACIFIC

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When one searches the literature of librarianship for evidence of information service progress in the Pacific area, there are some small descriptions of the tentative beginnnings of co-operation. Most of these writings come from the northern areas of the Pacific and there is a hint here and there that New Zealand is not in the Pacific but rather that it is on its rim. In a sense this is true and it is also true that in comparison with the hundreds of scattered islands and atolls, New Zealand is a substantial land mass, with a moderately well-developed economy - with all the ups and downs that such development implies.

Somehow or other, through the literature there is also the sense that those on the Pacific Rim, rather than in the Pacific, are less isolated, and nearer to their neighbours. This is not true of New Zealand, with its nearest neighbour more than a thousand miles away and the sources of its complex culture even more distant.

Indeed until the middle of this century New Zealand looked to Europe for cultural inspiration, for trading activity, and for identity in terms of the background of most of its then homogeneous population. In contrast librarians had drawn fairly vigourously on both British and American resources for their book purchasing and for the indexing services which were then (and now) the chief tools in the search for information in many subjects: public libraries in particular received a strong service impulse from the American training of their librarian and during the nineteen thirties.

Two factors have changed the views of New Zealanders in their outlook. The most potent in economic terms has been the change in interest within Great Britain which has ceased to be the Mother country and has done what every sensible parent should,

left us to make our way in the world. Her helping hand is given only if it is consistent with her own welfare in the European Community. Try as we will we are not an integral part of that Community, whatever our traditional ties to Britain. Instead we look to new markets, and new cultural connections, particularly in our own hemisphere and the area which an increasing proportion of our population regards as homeland - the island nations of the South Pacific.

New Zealand, once so homogeneously British, is increasingly influenced by the Polynesian cultures of its own Maori population, and of Samoans, Tongans, Fijians, Rarotongans and others who have immigrated over the last two decades and whose families will be ever more oriented to New Zealand while retaining a family connection up in the Pacific, just as many of the rest of us do with Britain and the continent of Europe.

So, if you will forgive the emphasis, I wish first to look at the information resources and planning within New Zealand, and then to see where that may fit in any future network designed to share these resources with our Pacific neighbours. You will see that to a small extent this sharing has begun but the new technologies being developed by our post offices may well extend the range of possibilities. I still say 'may extend' as the cost of these new developments act as very significant barriers to sharing resources, however willing we all are.

New Zealand itself has more than forty years of active co-operation in sharing library resources. The 1930s were a period of great change in library development there, but it was obvious to the librarians of the day - as indeed it had been at the very first Libraries Association meeting in Dunedin in 1910 - that one million people scattered in comparatively small centres over 1,000 miles of country were never going to be self sufficient either as little units or even as a total unit. In those early days the impetus for sharing came through the New Zealand Library Association and over the years the Association has continued to be a forum of debate and demand for national improvement.

Out of a first check list of serials designed primarily for university library co-operation, has grown the Union List of Serials in New Zealand libraries which will soon see daylight in its new shape of the Finding List of serials in New Zealand libraries - modelled on the British Library format and now in computer storage to be printed out on microfiche, in a much easier state for regular revision than in our earlier manual system. This will soon greatly ease the clearing house function for locating serials which is undertaken by the User Services of the National Library.

The National Library itself came into existence in 1966, amalgamating three existing state libraries through the National Library Act 1965: the General Assembly Library, servicing Parliament, the Alexander Turnbull Library, research library for New Zealand and Pacific materials, and the National Library Service which had grown gradually out of the Country Library Service, established in 1938. Within this earlier National Library Service there was already an active clearing house function for interloan, as well as a developing national central collection of overseas publications which was designed to supplement the stock of the major university, special, and public libraries, while the stock of the Country Library Service provided resources of first resort for the libraries of the many smaller communities which have been progressively developing free library service, when local authorities gave support for such activity: there is no compulsion placed on any New Zealand local authority to do this, although many of us wish that this were so.

But it is in its more recent role of information co-ordinator and provider that I wish to speak of the National Library, rather than its roles as library of first and last resort for book location, important as that is in information work.

The National Library Act places a very firm responsibility upon the National Librarian to see that New Zealand has good library service, and in all my good public library background, information provision was prime aim, so this aspect of our purposes strikes a responsive note. The Act also gives the Trustees of the National Library the right to set up advisory committees in various fields of interest. For our purposes here the two most important

have been the New Zealand Library Resources Committee and the Information Services Committee (which began its life as the SATIS Committee, to organise the national network of the Scientific and Technical Information Services).

The New Zealand Library Resources Committee is given some real purpose by having a fund of some $30,000 at its disposal annally. It is available upon application to libraries with known strengths in their collections but requiring an expensive purchase to complete or improve their resources. The aim is to purchase material not already held in the country, which will add to already developed strengths, and will be available anywhere through interloan. These grants, and the very careful allocation of central national library funds to microfiche series, has greatly added to New Zealand's total capacity to provide the resources which indexing service and computer-base searches locate. And just as individual libraries are not capable of self-sufficiency, neither are we as a country, and we have cause to be thankful for the international links which enable us to draw on libraries or other countries, but particularly on the Australian National Library and the British Library - one New Zealand researcher has been known to call books borrowed from the British Lending Library at Boston Spa as "from heaven".

Our long history of resource sharing and rationalisation now works through three co-ordinating committees - the one already discussed, which both gives and receives advice about national needs; the New Zealand Library Association's Library Resources Committee, which brings together a more varied grouping and is represented on the Trustees' Committee, and the Vice-Chancellor's Standing Committee on Library Resources, which concentrates on university needs but is geared also to receive as well as give advice.

All committees are strongly inclined to the view that full co-ordination will not be possible until an automated network is established to enable on-line consultation regarding acquisition of expensive items and series. Particularly we hope, in due course, to put the national Union Catalogue on-line, to enable more informed purchasing in support of known information needs.

The co-ordination of national information needs has not had the same kind of attention, probably because it is a more slippery subject to define, assign and control. The New Zealand Government has had very well-developed information services in those practical spheres which have been vital to the national economy. In particular the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries has a strong information section, backed by strong research institutions, and serviced by teams of advisers who take information right into the farm steading.

The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research has a multiplicity of research establishments and makes its expertise available to industry upon request. Its resources are not as well known as those of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, because it has had the same sufficiency of advisers to go out on such positive activities.

It is this capacity to disseminate information and even disseminate that such information exists which is notably lacking in most of our programmes - both in institutions with research programmes creating information, and in libraries of all kinds which too closely resemble storehouses rather than active promoters of the knowledge which they hold both of local generated information and the material purchased from abroad.

Creation of awareness has long been a feature of special libraries catering for limited personnel with known interests. The task of taking that concept into wider market is one of the characteristic features of the SATIS service, mentioned earlier in passing. This service to business and industry began in Auckland Public Library as the Auckland Commercial and Technical Information Services (ACTIS) and still retains that title in that city. However the need for business information extended beyond local government boundaries, and Auckland soon found that it could not sustain a regional service with city rates resources.

The National Library now subsidises this service for the Auckland area, while other subsidised offices are housed in the public libraries of Wellington and Christchurch. The public library system has been chosen as the location of the Scientific and Technical Information Service, as only the public library system reaches to all corners of the country. We are planning for controlled extension to other areas, and in the meantime businesses remote from SATIS may communicate directly with the SATIS centre in the National Library by telephone, telex or letter.

The Information Services Committee of the Trustees of the National Library was originally set up to formulate policy and advise the Minister of Education (who is Minister for the National Library) on the establishment of SATIS. Other sub-committees on such things as Documentation, and Automation have been numerous over the years and, doubtless, mutually informative. But in an era of limited budgeting, controlled staffing, and only tentative moves towards automation, the amount of achievement has not been great.

The Committee structure is now simplified into one master committe by which working groups can be set up for specific projects. Two recent and successful operations have been the Computer Based Information Services Working Group which set out to work towards access for New Zealand to overseas data bases by improved telecommunications links; and to study the advisability of establishing New Zealand data bases; and a MEDLINE Working Group to plan for MEDLINE access in the major medical libraries.

The first target was achieved much more quickly than we had believed possible. The New Zealand Post Office had first to be convinced that there was a market for such a telecommunications facility within New Zealand. The combination of lively business interests, the CBIS Working Group, and the New Zealand Commission for the Future (whose Chairman by coincidence is also Chairman of the Trustees Information Committee) carried the Post Office policy makers along towards a link with the United States via our OASIS node - the Australians call theirs MIDAS, which may well say something about our comparative national characters! This we have, with some technical uncertainties, now achieved.

The logical next step is an OASIS connection with Australia, our near neighbour and good friend; there already exists in that country the AUSINET information network, run by commercial enterprise but with strong National Library backing. The company which runs the Australian network has an important subsidiary company in New Zealand anxious to extend the system to New Zealand libraries. New Zealand librarians are interested.

The second CBIS question of New Zealand data bases has still to be fully explored and it is likely that a working group will be set up to consider the implications of co-ordinating existing efforts, and to commence discussions on the feasibility of establishing certain Australasian data bases with related subject personnel, time and money to reach solutions. Already Australia supplies BIOSIS and MEDLARS services to New Zealand clients, and we hope to achieve MEDLINE links through the National Library of Australia later this year.

What does all this mean for our Pacific neighbours? Not very much as yet. But then it has really hardly meant very much for New Zealand either. But given well established New Zealand and/or Australasian systems, there must be ways of sharing with our near Pacific neighbours, even if only by acting as agents for their libraries in performing on-line searches when required.

New Zealand input into overseas data bases has been quite limited in its subject fields and has tended to be confined to those co-operative systems which do not carry high costs. By 1970 New Zealand was contributing input to INIS, (International Nuclear Information System) and some four years later was conducting SDI profiles for a limited group within New Zealand. When AGRIS was developed for Agricultural science, the New Zealand Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries was able to participate by abstracting New Zealand material for input to the international resource, and has a well-developed current awareness programme in its central library.

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In the field of educational information the National Library of New Zealand has agreed to act as New Zealand clearing house for the submission of documents to ERIC on an annual basis, while the New Zealand Council for Educational Research will continue to submit its own publications as it has in the past. However we hope that there will be increasing New Zealand input as the significance of the system becomes better known. It would be a useful addition to New Zealand material if work done in, say, the University of the South Pacific were to be added to that of New Zealand. It may be that papers are already contributed but it seems worth exploring the work being done in the Pacific to ensure that it becomes as widely known as possible.

In South East Asia TECHNONET has been developing steadily and we hope within the next year to make available a range of New Zealand technical journals to SISIR for input to their information system, thus bringing a new link between our two regions. It would be interesting to see how effective an SDI service to New Zealand business men might be from Singapore.

In spite of apparent diversity and distance from each other, there have for a very long time been strong links between the countries of South East Asia and New Zealand. The Colombo Plan brought librarians for training to New Zealand library schools, while New Zealanders worked very happily over a number of years in this area. With this knowledge of each other it would be good to build new links for exchange of expertise, and of information.

In our connections with the Pacific Islands there has not been quite so systematic a link, although some students have trained in librarianship through the New Zealand correspondence course to further library practice in Samoa, the Cook Islands and elsewhere. Some support in book loans and advisory service has been given to these territories and to Nuie over the years but no systematic information system has yet been developed.

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We gladly supply, and give some priority in doing so, to the interloan requests coming from the University of the South Pacific. It is good to see that these have increased from 86 in 1975/76 to 180 in 1979/80, with brisk business going on currently (in fact, 76 from April-June 1980).

Perhaps we shall be able to offer more direct links and services when we have achieved satisfactory networks within New Zealand. SATIS has made small beginnings but we need to develop a better sense of urgency.

We accept the fact that in scattered locations throughout New Zealand we can go on-line to California to data bases there. I wonder when we shall be talking as freely to each other in New Zealand, to others throughout the Pacific and throughout Australasia.

At pr sent our only Pacific-wide information sharing facility is the NASA/PEACESAT which links regular information exchange sessions of many kinds, making sometimes tentative connections from Hawaii in the north to New Zealand in the south, from Santa Cruz in California to the Marianas and Papua-New Guinea. This is useful but gives little more to libraries than a tantalizing glimpse of what is possible in technological terms. As yet there is too great a scarcity throughout the major area of the Pacific of the kind of library expertise needed to develop and make proper use of such information networks.

Nevertheless PEACESAT performs an information sharing function in many practical ways, and can act as a means of consultation in emergency.

The business of resource and information sharing can only be effective if we have adequate knowledge of the resources available and the routes to obtaining them. The progress of bibliographical control of publications of the Pacific area remains slow. Even in New Zealand, where the retrospective National Bibliography to 1960 is almost complete, we are sure that we currently fail to locate all of the items which should reach the National Library through the legal deposit condition of the Copyright Act: and that with our present manual production systems we cannot record all that is deposited.

Clearly it must be infinitely more difficult for those territories scattered over many hundreds of squre miles of ocean. But without bibliographical records the business of informing the world about ourselves becomes impossible. We believe that we have resources, developments, opinions and ideas which are worth promulgating to each other and which may even be of wider interest and benefit.

In the field of national bibliography two conferences have now been held in Fiji. The records show that few national bibliographies have yet been achieved but progress is evident. For instance, the Solomon Islands bibliography may reach fruition in the not too distant future with the Nuffield Foundation and the New Zealand National Library supporting research in London later this year. These conferences have had the very important function of raising the consciousness for the need for such work, and they have indicated the willingness of those in this part of the world to give mutual assistance. Perhaps indeed it is this consciousness of each other that is the greatest gain between New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours over the last three decades. Having established our our mutual interest we should look for opportunities to make modern communications act as both diminishers of distance and as a substitute for documentation when that is not available, or perhaps not even necessary.